My Fish Hat Kingdom

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Edition three of three.

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Mei Fung Elizabeth Chan
A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking in the Department of Printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

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By
Mei Fung Elizabeth Chan
2017

Approved by the

Andrew Raftery, Graduate Director of Printmaking, Department of Printmaking, RISD, Thesis Chair

T. Louis Ogden, Associate Professor, Department of Printmaking, Bridgeport State University, Thesis Adviser

Jonathan Weinberg, Lecturer, Department of Printmaking, RISD, Thesis Adviser
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Approved by the Master’s Examination Committee:

Andrew Raftery, Graduate Director of Printmaking, Department of Printmaking, RISD, Thesis Chair

Leigh Craven, Associate Professor, Department of Printmaking, Bridgewater State University, Thesis Advisor

Jonathan Weinberg, Lecturer, Department of Printmaking, RISD, Thesis Advisor
To my Heavenly Father,

Thanks for travelling with me through this journey. I would like to thank Andrew Raftery who helped me all the way along this thesis project, Jonathan Weinberg for his guidance on thesis writing, Cornelia McSheehy for my printmaking practice, Leigh Craven for my thesis project guidance, Wai Kit Sze for my studio practice, my family for my tuition and financial support. Thank you for helping to shape my thoughts and hone my practice; I could not study art without all of your support.

I would also like to thank my family again for their support and care. Thank you for your love.

Amen.
Abstract

This thesis book documents my personal and artistic research. As a Chinese contemporary printmaker, I consider my artworks embedded in Eastern and Western elements to revitalize my printmaking practice. I shape my art to reveal my Hong Kong identity by creating self-portraits. Instead of trying to capture a single moment and place in one image, I create multi-dimensional images in terms of both space and time. Inspired by Italian Early Renaissance altarpieces, I break up the images to suggest a narrative sequence. All of my prints are printed in large scale so that my viewers will be engaged in each image.
Introduction

In 2015, before I came to the Rhode Island School of Design, I made political art about the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, which was a protest against the government. But when I came to America, I took my female identity, memory and experience as a new start. I changed my subject matter from the political to the personal. I expressed myself by placing self-portraits in landscapes. This thesis project gave me the power to change reality and to create impossible things. Narrative prints continue to provide me with the momentum and vitality to create fantastical stories and spaces that my viewers can share.

My thesis consists of a suite of prints based on mythology, stories and my environment. I have placed myself into the scene and changed reality. These social phenomena are inspired by the daily news and my living place. In my prints, I strive to create my *Fish Hat Kingdom* in order to better engage my viewers with a pictorial space that is concise and serene. This suite of prints is the creation of my imagination. Each piece has been created in a limited palette to evoke an imagined, illusionistic space. It presents a “surreal” world with texture, value and depth that connects with something that is more important than reality.
静夜思

『床前明月光，疑是地上霜。
举头望明月，低头思故乡。』

李白

I always want to create snow scenes because I never experienced snow in Hong Kong. This print was created during winter in New England. I was overwhelmed by the coldness of the weather and the purity of the snowflakes.
In Western churches, they often utilize physical space as a way to convey the time and sequencing of a story. Hence, I divided the space into three parts. In the background, I am on a boat to indicate how I came to this snowy place. In ancient China, people used gourds as containers for collecting water, wine, medicine and magic potions. In this case, I am holding a magic gourd, which can change the size of my body. The juxtaposing of a larger me, next to a smaller me, creates an off balance and imaginative image. This print shows the sneakers that my mother gave me when I left Hong Kong for America, as well as the shirt that she bought me to keep me warm. I designed this print with three different stages of composition, the front, the middle, and the far. I added an Asian temple in order to remember my past living place. The moon was added to recall the first night when I missed my family.
“Thoughts in The Silent Night”

Thoughts in the Silent Night
Beside my bed a pool of light
Is it hoarfrost on the ground?
I lift my eyes and see the moon,
I bend my head and think of home.

Li Bai
During my initial stay in Rhode Island, I felt extremely anxious due to the sudden change of living conditions. The mountains and the trees have changed. The feeling of loneliness got stronger particularly during winter. I attempt to reveal the coldness and loneliness of my feelings. I asked myself, where am I? Why am I here? Where is my family? Can the magic gourd take me back home?
陋室铭

『山不在高，有仙则名；
水不在深，有龍則靈。
斯是陋室，惟吾德馨。
苔痕上階緑，草色入簾青。
談笑有鴻儒，往來無白丁。』

劉禹錫
2. *Relocation*, 2017, plate lithography on Xuan paper, 24.5 x 35 inches.

This print was created when I read the Chinese myth called “The Great Flood of Gun-Yu”. I imagine myself as a leader who is guiding these elephants to help Yu to control the
flooding. Elephants are wise spirits and have the power to ward off evil. I am showing the power of elephants and these Fish Hat People to form communities that help each other to solve problems.

I like to explore spatial arrangements and printmaking materials. I am drawn to the pictorial expressions of the traditional Ukiyo-e woodcut style, which features landscape scenes. In this print, the compositions are divided into three parts. At the front of the scene, a group of elephants are walking from left to right. On the lower left corner, I am holding a lithographer’s fan and pointing at the animals in order to lead the viewers to look closer at the space. At the middle part of the print, I drew the elephants in zigzag walking path so that the composition would be more dynamic. The Fish Hat People are riding the elephants because they are my imaginary people. I put the river with a bridge as a link between two cultures, with Western and Eastern architecture juxtaposing each other. There is also a willow tree on the right hand corner to indicate the kind of trees I knew back home in Hong Kong. The limited blue creates the feeling of coldness you get from a snowy scene.
3. *Negligible*, 2017, stone lithography on BFK paper, 22.5 × 30.5 inches.

During the winter of 2016, I travelled back to Hong Kong and visited my brother in Shanghai. My brother took me to visit different places and I discovered many new things. During my
Shanghai trip, I visited the China Art Palace locating in Pudong. I was fascinated by the digital version of “Along the River During Qing Ming Festival”. A Song artist called Zhang Zeduan created the original painting. This painting is one of the most majestic treasures in Chinese art history. This genre painting shows the capital of Northern Song Dynasty, in Bianjing, now Kaifeng of Henan Province.

After my trip back to America, I had an idea to create an image related to the Xia Dynasty in China. The location of the image is related to the story of the Great Flood of Gun-Yu. I was imagining the sudden weather changing before flooding. The darkness of the sky indicates flooding or a storm coming. I created one third of the space to show the endless sky, and two third of the space for the ground. In the background, I drew tiny human beings that are dwarfed by the pyramid. This conveys the negligibility of human lives. At the front of the stage, I placed four protective gods to frighten my viewers and ward off the evil spirits.
"Lou Shi Ming"

No matter how high the mountain is,
its name will spread far and wide
if there is a myth about it.

Liu Yuxi

After returning from a trip to Rome in April of 2017, I realized the importance of public squares in modern society. During my visit to Palatine Hill, I was fascinated by the areas of
open space and the way each statue was placed within it. The structure of the space reminds me of the temples that I have visited in Japan and in China. Growing up in Hong Kong, space is rather limited, so I enjoy this feeling of spaciousness and freedom. In this piece, I have constructed a garden for my Fish Hat People. Inspired by the off balance and imaginative figurative paintings of Paula Rego and Ethane Murrow, I decided to play around with the different poses and sizes of my self-portraits within the print. I have also researched how to develop space from Antonio López I separated this garden scene into two sides. On the left side, I placed a special Western fountain with different sculptures, including lambs, female nudes, and self-portraits with fish hats. In addition, I am holding the gourd in the foreground. There is a cat looking at the other side to represent curiosity.

On the right side of the print, I placed an elephant monument at the centre of the garden. It is based on the lovely Elephant and Obelisk monument designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. I was inspired by Artemisia Gentileschi’s painting called Corsica and the Satyr that I saw in Rome; I mimic their poses. In the background, I mixed both Providence and Rome architectures to indicate my presence in both countries.
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Plate 1.
The Magic Gourd, 2017, plate lithography on Xuan paper, 24.5 x 35 inches.

Plate 2.
Relocation, 2017, plate lithography on Xuan paper, 22.5 x 32 inches.

Plate 3.
Negligible, 2017, stone lithography on Fawn paper, 22.5 x 30.5 inches.

Plate 4.
Garden series I, 2017, three plates lithography on BFK paper, 24.5 x 35 inches.

Plate 5.
Garden series II, 2017, three plates lithography on Gampi paper, 24.5 x 35 inches.
Bibliography


